



**FAILURES OF LOCAL SCHOOL BOARDS  
IN PERFORMING THEIR ROLES AS SOCIETY'S  
REPRESENTATIVE IN CONTROLLING PUBLIC SCHOOLS  
IN *WAITING FOR SUPERMAN* FILM**

**A JOURNAL**

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# INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Background of the Study

United States of America, which is recognized as a powerful country puts a great concern toward education. This can be seen from the way government provides free public education for its citizens. Yet, the quality is questionable. The Board of Education is the council responsible for providing good education; it is also responding to community wishes for educational betterment. In its leadership, problems appear and lead to failing public schools. This eventually brings failures to students. Such existing situation in American public schools can be seen through literary works, film is one in case. *Waiting for Superman* is one showing it.

*Waiting for Superman* is a film depicting the failing of public schools in American society. It is a documentary film which tries to present factual information about what happens in American public schools. The film presents several problems faced by American public schools, for instances, lacking qualified teachers, growing students spending, producing static achievement, and conflicting regulations.

## 1.2 Scope of the Study

The writer studies the intrinsic and extrinsic aspects of the film. The intrinsic covers the elements of narrative and documentary film. Furthermore, in the extrinsic aspects, the writer focuses on analyzing the American public schools systems and

comprehending the role of local school boards in controlling American public schools in the *Waiting for Superman* film.

### **1.3 Purposes of the Study**

The objectives of this study are as follows; to understand American's public education system, its public schools, in *Waiting for Superman* film and to comprehend the role of local school board of education in controlling public schools in *Waiting for Superman* film.

### **1.4 Methods of the Study**

#### **1.4.1 Method of Research**

The writer applies library research in conducting the research. The film is used as main data; she also refers to other supporting data, e.g., books, articles, and journals taken from the library and internet to collect information of the object studied.

#### **1.4.2 Method of Approach**

In analyzing the film, the writer applies exponential approach and sociology of literature approach. The first is used to analyze the intrinsic aspect, which consist of narrative and documentary film elements. The narrative involves character, plot, setting, and conflict. Meanwhile, the cinematographic documentary film contains narration, interview, archive footage, animation, cinema verite, music and sound, and graphics. The last is used to examine the extrinsic aspects of the film. It is to study the social contents of the works.

## SYNOPSIS

*Waiting for Superman* is a documentary film released in 2010 about public schools in the United States of America. It is directed by Davis Guggenheim. This film tells a story of five students with a hope for higher and better education. They are Anthony, Daisy, Bianca, Francisco, and Emily. These five students represent children living across America with various backgrounds, who strive for a great education.

The stories of those five students give description on what is going on in American public schools. They are example of Americans students with a high hope for a better future. But the public school systems are working against them. The failing schools force those children to find the way out, solution, on their own. This should be the duties of board of education to solve the matters and fix the situation.

Lacking of qualified teachers is one of several problems faced by public schools. This leads to high rate of dropout students. Public schools produce more dropout students rather than college-enter students. Further, there is a decline in students' testing scores and academic achievements. Even though American students have confidence in solving test questions, like Mathematics, in reality they lack ability to do it.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

To analyze a literary work means to identify the separate parts that make it up. Therefore, the writer analyzes the film through its basic elements. It is to explain what a work of literature means, an audiovisual medium, through its intrinsic and extrinsic aspects. The intrinsic is parts existing within the literary work itself, rather than coming from outside. Extrinsic aspect, in contrast, is parts coming from the outside the literary work.

### **3.1 Intrinsic Aspects**

Starting point in appreciating the researched film entitled *Waiting for Superman* is to analyze the work itself. The writer studies two elements that make it up; they are narrative and documentary cinematic elements. The narrative aspects involve character, plot, setting, and conflict. The documentary cinematic aspects consist of narration, interview, archive footage, animation, cinema verite, music and sound, and graphics.

### **3.2 Extrinsic Aspects**

The extrinsic aspect studies the parts which come from the outside of a literary work. The study of this research is to dig out the meaning of intrinsic parts and relate it with the social context attached in the object researched.

#### **3.2.1 Role Theory**

The term 'role' usually links to positions/statuses belong to one in society. It deals with functions of the person who occupies certain positions in society. Actually,

the idea of 'role' originated from role which relates to actor's part in a play. William Shakespeare once said that this world is like a theater where each actor has his/her own roles to play. To put this scene into a social scheme, it means each person must understand his place/position in society and carry out his role properly.

### **3.2.2 American Public Education Systems**

In the United States of America, education system applied is a decentralized one. This means each state has an authority to govern its public education, public schools, within the state's borders. State's government delegates this educational concern to a board of education, the one that runs the public schools.

Most states have two types of board of education, namely: state school board and local school board of education. Unger argues that state school board of education may be responsible for all public schools in the state; it may be in charge of partial or total policy making, depends on state's constitution. Meanwhile, local school board of education has the authority delegates from state school board of education to determine educational policies within the state's framework authority; it is the agents of the state (2007:155-156). In other words, local school board is responsible to carry out state's laws locally and apply in its jurisdictional region.

## **ANALYSIS**

### **4.1 Characters Dealing with the Issue of Local School Board of Education's Role**

By studying events happen to people involves in the film, it can be understood the role of the board of education. Analysis below also explains failures of the board in safeguarding children's educational right. How the boards are neglecting their principal duties.

The five main characters in the film, Anthony, Daisy, Francisco, Bianca, and Emily experience the failing system of public schools in the neighborhood. The board's responsibility is well documented and it must be understood and implemented. In fact, the responsibility is not properly done. It can be seen in Anthony's and Daisy's case. Applied curriculum in Sousa Junior High is leaving it students behind. It is interesting to look at statement in narration above "he will enter high school three to five grade levels behind". Then the question is what do the students do or learn at school? This implies that something is wrong with curriculum or teacher, or both, which rooted from the leadership of education provider, local school boards. This is a proof that the schools cause student fails by either not forming proper curriculum or not providing well-qualified teacher; as it is expected. Otherwise, if it lets students fail and inhibit them to dig out their potentials, it should be reformed. And for those who do not carry out the responsibility as board's members properly should be evaluated. Board should provide appropriate curriculum

to encourage students' potentials. It is the board responsibility to ensure that superintendent applies an accurate measure of student achievement and apply standards for qualified teachers. By realizing this, an excellent outcome will be attained.

It is clear that local school board should set the direction for the community's schools and perform suitably. This is the basic thing, to safeguard children educational right by setting a clear plan for what should school and students reach. As a result, school district will have a clear guideline to conduct the programs approved by the board. Looking at the existence of the outdated system like tracking system experienced by Emily in this era is a proof that the local school board does not provide or maintain school's direction to reach students' full potentials.

#### **4.2 Plot Dealing with the Organization of American Public Education**

Through its story line, it can be known the organization of American public education system. How the power is delegated to local agencies, and how one can enroll in a public school.

The story began with introduction of students involved in the film, Anthony, Daisy, Francisco, Bianca, and Emily. The title of this film was inspired by a power, like Superman had, to save them from the failing school and neighborhood. The middle part of the story, conflict, contains further explanation of education system in American public schools as experienced by those five students and other students across the United States of America. This also relates to boards of education's responsibility in providing great public education for the students across the United



States of America. In the end of the story, it can be concluded that problems in public schools remain unresolved.

#### **4.3 Settings Relating to Students Educational Achievement**

Several actual geographical locations are shown in film; it shows where characters live. They are Washington D.C., Redwood City in California, and Harlem in New York. Through these locations it can be concluded enrollment system in public schools. Enrolling in a public school in the neighborhood is automatic. Therefore, unless people have enough sources to send their children to a private school, they will be trapped in the public school neighborhood.

Environment is not responsible for providing great school for students; on the contrary, local school boards, the policymakers, are the one responsible. To have thoughtful and well-educated citizens in disadvantaged environment will help changing the failing neighborhood to be better.

#### **4.4 Conflicts Arising between Educators in Controlling Public Schools**

It is shown in the film that an educator, named Michelle Rhee, tries to reform D.C. public schools system. Considering her chief duty to produce and raise student achievement; she does everything possible to accomplish the goal. Yet, the more she tries to change for advancement, the more she runs against the system, the policy makers, state. Fundamental things she recommends to alter are not approved, for instances, extending the school day, effectively evaluating teachers or altering the terms of tenure.

Further, Michelle Rhee fires several principals, including her own children school. Further, she closes down 23 public schools that she deem inappropriate. This causes rage from teacher union. Teachers are losing their jobs. Demonstrations are everywhere as a result of Rhee's actions. Pictures below is an archival footage of several protests occurred against D.C. superintendent.

As a result of her actions, Rhee has to face the rage of teachers union. It is hard to fire incompetent public school teachers and replace with the qualify ones because teachers are automatically engaged in contract. This is a difficult matter to solve. Therefore, Rhee proposed a deal with unions, because the teachers' matters are the basic thing to change in order to make betterment of public education in the country.

## **CONCLUSION**

Several scenes of the film show that education providers, board of education, deserve to be dismissed from their duties. It is because the law has been broken and society's demand has been neglected. It can be seen that failing public school is a factual result of a sick role occupied by board of education members. Indeed, education is a timeless problem which causes debates and conflicts amongst educators and society up to now.

In conclusion, roles performed by the Board of Education are not appropriate. It does not carry out the job described in the detail documentation of board's role. Board has made delinquencies toward its roles regarding its duties. These wrongly executed plans bring down students. This is in compliance with the title of the film; the students across the country are still waiting for a super power, superman, to save them from failing public schools. They wait for solutions, waiting for the adults to cooperate and fix education in country. Then the question is what if superman never came to save them? Should they wait forever? What should they do?